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COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Bergen Community College students began tending to a hydroponic garden this summer.

Agriculture Education Grows with \$4.5 Million Federal Grant

The federal government has awarded Bergen Community College a five-year, \$4.5 million grant to help contribute to the development of future food, agriculture, natural resources and human sciences (FANH) professionals. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) "From Learning to Leading: Cultivating the Next Generation of Diverse Food and Agriculture Professionals Program" (NEXGEN) sought proposals from colleges that would create pathways to employment in FANH fields, while prioritizing the selection of institutions that serve diverse student populations. USDA officials formally announced the \$262.5 million Inflation Reduction Act-funded initiative on June 21 at a kickoff event in Washington D.C. with representatives from the 33 partners selected for the grant.

in preparing students for in-demand careers in our region," President Eric M. Friedman, Ph.D., said. "I am thrilled that the federal government has recognized Bergen's contributions to the local economy and endorsed our plans for developing a sustainably conscious workforce."

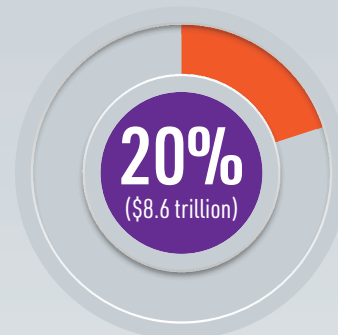
The acquisition and retention of sector employees remains a key concern of federal officials. The USDA itself has a severe staffing shortage, losing more than 5,000 workers during the last six years. The NEXGEN program remains a critical component to stemming the problem, according to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack. The secretary – a resident of agriculture-rich Iowa – led the agency during all eight years of the Obama administration and the past two of the Biden administration.

"Bergen Community College represents a leader

Agriculture - Continued on page 2.

BY THE NUMBERS - Agriculture, Education and Bergen

U.S. Economy
Food and Agriculture

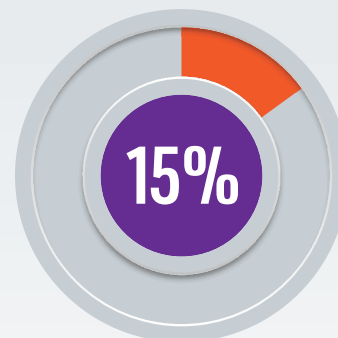


Bergen County Agricultural Economic Output

\$10.1 Billion

Total U.S. Employment

Food, Agriculture, Natural Resources and Human Sciences Professionals



Bergen County Employment

Food, Agriculture, Natural Resources and Human Sciences Professionals

67,883

2023 Feeding the Economy Report

\$4.5 Million Grant for Agriculture Education, *continued*



Dr. PJ Ricatto, Professor of Chemistry, demonstrates the operation of the Rocket composter.

"We need to ensure our youth have the education and training they need to accelerate the development of an agricultural system that is climate-smart, sustainable, profitable and equitable," Vilsack said at the June 21 kickoff event. "This historic investment from the Biden-Harris Administration in our nation's minority-serving institutions brings us closer to building a workforce that represents the richness and diversity of all the communities we serve."

The NEXGEN program also seeks to diversify the FANH talent pool by specifically targeting institutions of higher education that serve underrepresented populations of students. Among them, the USDA identified Historically Black Colleges and Universities, tribal colleges and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI), such as Bergen, as eligible for the program. The HSI designation applies to colleges where Hispanic students account for at least one-quarter of their total enrollment. Over 40 percent of Bergen students identify as Hispanic or Latino.

Under the grant, which will provide funding through June 2028, Bergen will develop numerous initiatives to serve approximately 600 students. Among the focus areas as defined by the USDA, Bergen will enhance its current academic offerings to include learning opportunities on sustainable food production and safety practices, waste management and agribusiness. The College will leverage its existing strengths—including the nation's only community college STEM Student Research Center, its Rocket composter and hydroponic labs, and an in-development culinary arts learning facility to support the objectives.

Bound by the goal of spurring student interest and encouraging growth within the individual FANH sectors and industries, the College will offer paid experiential learning opportunities, scholarships and enhanced coursework in fields related to the grant. Bergen offers a significant number of programs in FANH fields, including culinary arts, environmental science and horticulture.

Longtime Bergen professor and former dean of mathematics, science and technology PJ Ricatto, Ph.D., will direct the project at the College. Professors John Cichowski, Ed.D., and Ronda Drakeford will assist Ricatto.

"This remains an incredibly exciting opportunity for students interested in food, agriculture, natural resources and human sciences fields," Ricatto said. "I look forward to initiating the many programs, activities and resources we have planned as part of this grant."

Among the initiatives, the College will connect its Bergen Cares Center, an on-campus food pantry and social services resource, to NEXGEN by creating a farm-to-table pipeline of food grown at the College for distribution at the center. Temple University research indicates that more than one-third of community college students experience food insecurity at some point during their time enrolled.

In all, Bergen's participation in NEXGEN reflects College officials' ongoing prioritization of developing programs that not only respond to community needs, but remain rooted in sustainable practices that encourage health and wellness. These ideas appear throughout President Friedman's goals and the institution's recently revised mission, vision and values statements. The Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey and Commerce Magazine recently recognized Bergen's sustainability efforts with an award for environmental stewardship. ■

Goodbye to Summer Soiree!



Lake House at the
Indian Trails Club
830 Franklin Lake Road
Franklin Lakes, New Jersey

September 27, 2023
6:00 - 9:00 p.m.
Tickets - \$140
foundation.bergen.edu

**A Benefit for the
Bergen Community College
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**Reserve
Your Ticket**



Snapshotted



Bergen PRIDE Traveled to the Jersey Pride Parade in Asbury Park



College Officials Recently Reviewed Plans for the New Culinary Arts Center



Bergen Alumni Theatre Presented "A Midsummer Night's Dream"



A Panel Discussion with Veterans Took Centerstage on Women Veterans Day



County Leaders Honored CFO Wilton Thomas-Hooke, Assistant VP Dr. Jennifer Migliorino-Reyes, and Adjunct Faculty Member Hugo Jimenez during Caribbean-American Heritage Month

Englese and Haughton Join Trustee Board

Two Bergen County residents with extensive experience in government, education and non-profits have joined the Bergen Community College Board of Trustees. Damon Englese and Howard Haughton took the oath of office at the Board's May 7 meeting. Their terms will expire October 31 when they will become eligible for reappointment.

"Mr. Englese and Mr. Haughton bring records of expertise in effective governance to the Bergen Community College Board of Trustees," Chair Dorothy Blakeslee said. "I welcome them to the Board and look forward to their contributions."



Englese, a career educator with 23 years of experience, began as a teacher in Union City. He currently serves as principal of the E. Roy Bixby Elementary School in Bogota. He also serves as president of the principals and supervisor association within the district.

Englese represented Dumont as a councilperson from 2019-2021, serving as the department of public works chair and police commissioner. He earned a bachelor's degree in business administration and finance from Seton Hall Uni-

versity and a master's degree in educational administration and supervision from St. Peter's University. He holds teaching, school business administrator and superintendent of schools licensing in New Jersey.

Haughton, a Bergen alumnus who earned an



A.A.S. from the institution, works as the CEO of Eva's Village, Inc., a behavioral health and social service organization located in Paterson. Among his various civic contributions,

Haughton served as an elected member of the Englewood Public School District Board of Education and he currently serves as the board secretary for the Englewood Public Library. He carries life memberships for Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and the NAACP. In addition to graduating from Bergen, Haughton earned a bachelor's degree from Stockton University.

The College's 12-person governing body is comprised of nine individuals appointed by the county, two by the governor and one elected by the student body. Bergen's president serves as an ex-officio member of the Board. ■

55,000 Reasons To Celebrate

Recent graduate Rene Bulnes has earned the \$55,000 per year Jack Kent Cooke Foundation's Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship – the most prestigious award for community college students. Bulnes represents one of only 60 students nationwide to receive this year's award among more than 1,700 who applied.



"This is a once in a lifetime opportunity and I'm still in disbelief," he said. "I want my accomplishments and triumphs to serve as a source of motivation and empowerment for immigrants and underrepresented minorities, inspiring them to pursue their aspirations with determination and resilience."

Bulnes graduated from Bergen this May with an associate of applied science in computer science. Among his accomplishments at the College, Bulnes participated in a research internship, served as vice president of the STEM Student Union and was an active participant in Phi Theta Kappa, the honor society of two-year colleges.

Last month, Bulnes presented at the 2023 Enterprise Computing Conference at Marist College on a research project he completed last summer—a hyperledger fabric-based solution for secure transcript management. He was the only community college student to present at the conference.

Bulnes plans to transfer to Stevens Institute of Technology to pursue a bachelor's degree in computer engineering, while also aspiring to earn a master's degree in information science. The Cooke Scholarship will cover up to \$55,000 each year at Stevens.

"My aim is to become a leader in technology and contribute to the STEM workforce by innovating and creating tools that can benefit both the industry and my community," Bulnes said.

Twenty-one Bergen students have earned the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship during the last decade. ■

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Alumna Earns "Employee of the Year" Honor



Alumna Hao Li Ee ('95), a technology support professional for Suncoast Technical College in Sarasota, Florida, recently received recognition as the "School Related Employee of the Year" from the Superintendent of Sarasota County Schools in the Sarasota County School District. Li Ee invited Professor Emerita Lois Sullivan - her mentor of 30 years - as her guest at the ceremony.

"We met when Hao Li was a Bergen student," Sullivan said. "Her gifts of brilliance, energy and insights are the qualities that bring her many successes in her professional and personal life."

Li Ee credits Bergen as the "stepping stone" that launched her career in banking.

"I attribute much of my success and recognition to the life lessons learned from being an international student at Bergen Community College," said Li Ee. "I continue to learn, improve,

and share what I have learned with others. I attribute my success at Bergen, to the high quality of instruction and opportunities that I received from instructional staff, student counselors and fellow tutors."

Professor Kaye Demetz's Speech Communication course stands out as a favorite class, as does her time on the tennis team coached by Professor Robert Thompson. Li Ee graduated from Bergen with an associate in applied science in banking, credit and finance.

Li Ee remains active, participating in crew where she won gold, silver, and bronze medals at the International Dragon Boat Federation World Club Crew Championship. Her team received recognition from the Sarasota County Commission for outstanding achievement at an international event.

Her advice for future alumni?

"Take advantage of the diversity in culture and curriculum at Bergen Community College to enhance your careers and go farther in life," Li Ee said. ■



Party City Partners with Bergen Community College

Officials from Bergen Community College and Party City recently collaborated on a pair of June events that provided learning opportunities for the College's students and company personnel.

The first event brought students from Bergen's LatinxCEO experiential education program and the Office of Multicultural Services and Activities (pictured above) to Party City's global headquarters in Woodcliff Lake for a day of hands-on learning. Party City executives led a panel discussion on tips for succeeding in business and also sponsored interview workshops for the students. The College launched LatinxCEO earlier this year to provide minority students with the resources, skills and experience they need to challenge underrepresentation in the workplace. The program combines two priorities outlined in the College's strategic goals: creating new workforce development initiatives and enhancing its approach to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI).

Just two days later, Bergen and Party City switched roles. This time, the College provided an educational experience for company staff. Party City leaders selected Bergen Dean of Research and Institutional Effectiveness Tonia McKoy, Ed.D., to serve as the keynote speaker at the company's Juneteenth celebration at its headquarters. Seeking to raise awareness about the federal holiday and educate its employees, Party City employees embraced this learning opportunity. Before a crowd of hundreds of Party City staffers, McKoy detailed the history of Juneteenth and discussed why DEI initiatives create belonging at organizations. She also encouraged those in attendance to explore the College's offerings and visit the institution's main campus "just nine miles down the road."

The College's Bergen for Business Director Linda Caruso worked with Executive Director of Continuing Education and Workforce Development Cinzia D'Iorio to create LatinxCEO and establish the relationship with Party City officials. ■

Jump for Joy – Bergen's National Champion

Student-athlete Kaden Stevens is a national champion. Stevens placed first in the triple jump at the National Junior College Athletic Association Division III men's outdoor track and field championship last month in Utica, New York. En route to the national title in the triple jump, which featured a leap of 14.24 meters, Stevens also placed second in the long jump. For his efforts, Stevens earned a spot on the first-team All-America roster.



"I was absolutely ecstatic," he said. "I put so much work into this moment that it was almost overwhelming."

In a season marred by injuries, Stevens had an indirect path to the national championship. He only competed in two regular season meets, limiting his chances to earn a national championship bid. Nonetheless, Stevens placed second in his events at the spring Ramapo Invitational and earned a spot at nationals. He credited his parents, coaches and teammates for encouraging him to persevere.

"Because of the hurdles I went through, I realized that I'm a lot stronger than I may have thought I am," he said.

Stevens graduated from the College as part of the May 2023 class, earning an associate of science degree in computer science. He plans to transfer to a four-year college, though he will take a gap year to prepare. The time away from campus life will also afford him with the opportunity to possibly earn a scholarship as he navigates his college search. ■

Emeritus Class of 2023 Inducted

Eleven retired professors earned the rank of "professor emeritus" as part of the 2023 class elected by their peers. This year, Dr. Sidney Birnback, Dr. Lynda Box, Celeste Finney (pictured with Dr. Brock Fisher), Dr. Mark Kassop, Lillian Ostrander, Richard Comerford, Dr. George Cronk, Dr. Randolph Forsstrom, Dr. Anne Maganzini, Dr. Geoffrey Sadock and Dr. Jon Yasin had their names added to the elite company of 59 previously inducted faculty who made significant impacts at the institution. The professor emeritus program began in 1988 with the induction of former dean Alan Buxton. Selection relies on many factors, including exemplary teaching and scholarship. Professor Kate McGivern leads the



five-member committee charged with choosing honorees after receiving nominations from academic divisions and faculty. ■

A Parting Gift for Two Bergen Scholars

Just hours after becoming newly minted Bergen Community College graduates, students Yoav Aharon and Mana Mehdizadeh learned they would each receive a \$10,000 scholarship through Phi Theta Kappa, the honor society of junior colleges. Only 15 PTK members from more than 2,700 applicants earned the Hites Transfer Scholarship, which recognizes students with sterling records of academic achievement, leadership and community engagement. The Hites Transfer Scholarship represents the largest scholarship offered through PTK.



Aharon majored in sociology at Bergen. During his time at the College, he served as the vice president, chief justice and chair of the academic committee of the Student Government Association. Aharon also completed a

research internship for John Hopkins University, studying social anxiety disorders. He previously earned the \$1,000 Phi Theta Kappa Coca-Cola Leaders of Promise Scholar award.

"Throughout my educational journey, my focus on studying human behavior through the social

sciences has never been more institutionally supported than at Bergen Community College," Aharon said. "I'm honored to accept this scholarship as an investment in my education. It's an investment that will more than pay itself back in the form of my continued contribution to the academic world."

Mehdizadeh led Bergen's class of 2023 as valedictorian – the top student among all graduates. Her 4.0 GPA and time as a tutor/academic coach in the College's Cerullo Learning Assistance Center led to spots as a Coca-Cola Academic Team Gold Scholar and on the New Jersey All-State Academic Team. Mehdizadeh also served as vice president of service for PTK and as an intern for New Jersey State Representative Shama Haider (D-37).



"I want to dedicate this scholarship to the esteemed Bergen faculty, staff, and administration," Mehdizadeh said. "Their unwavering support allowed me to achieve academic excellence and become a leader during my time at Bergen." ■



CARES Center Coordinator Honored

The Meadowlands Chamber has recognized Bergen CARES Center Coordinator Rachel Sloma with its "50 Under 30 Outstanding Emerging Leader" award. In celebration of the chamber's 50th anniversary, the organization honored 50 individuals younger than 30 years-old who have made significant contributions at their places of employment. Sloma (pictured with Dr. Jennifer Migliorino-Reyes and Dr. Anthony Trump) received the award at the chamber's May 18 "BizFest 23" event that took place at American Dream in East Rutherford.

"This award only gives me more ambition to create new opportunities for our students, staff and faculty," Sloma said. "I want to thank Dr. Jennifer Migliorino-Reyes for the nomination; without her and Dr. Stafford Barton's guidance and support I would not be able to have the opportunities to grow the pantry into what it is today."

Sloma directs the Bergen Cares Center, an on-campus food pantry and social service resource at the College's main campus in Paramus. Under her leadership, the center has expanded its scope of services to include a clothing closet - "Threads" - that students can visit to obtain suits, dresses and other items appropriate for professional interviews and jobs. The clothing closet launched with a soft opening in the spring as Sloma prepares for an official launch in September.

The 50 Under 30 award winner began at Bergen in 2021 as a part-time staffer in the on-campus food pantry. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the College sought to expand many of its wraparound and educational support services to provide greater support for students struggling with challenges outside of the classroom. Among them, it launched the Cares Center with Sloma as its first full-time coordinator. For more information on the Cares Center, email bergencares@bergen.edu. ■



Register Now for Fall Classes

Classes begin September 6
bergen.edu